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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASTANA 002576

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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: DINNER WITH STATE SECRETARY
SAUDABAYEV

REF: A. ASTANA 2553
 [B](#). ASTANA 2570
 [C](#). ASTANA 2410
 [D](#). ASTANA 2551
 [E](#). ASTANA 2372

Classified By: Ambassador Richard E. Hoagland: 1.4 (A), (B), (D)

[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY: Kazakhstan's self-described Number Two and President Nazarbayev's confidante, State Secretary Kanat Saudabayev, told the Ambassador on December 29:

-- Kazakhstan would give TRANSCOM a positive reply to the U.S. request to include Kazakhstan as an essential link in the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) to commercially supply and provision U.S. troops in Afghanistan; in fact, he called the Ambassador on December 30 to report President Nazarbayev's "green light" for the NDN;

-- Kazakhstan wants to accelerate its negotiations with the United States for WTO accession, but is facing increased skepticism within the government;

-- he was unaware of the investigation against a Peace Corps Volunteer for allegedly violating national security, but would work to ensure an outcome to remove this irritant in the bilateral relationship;

-- Nazarbayev's exiled former son-in-law remains a front-burner issue (however, he did not press for further U.S. involvement);

-- he will travel to Washington for the February 5 National Prayer Breakfast and would like to meet the new Secretary of State, but conceded a slightly later visit might be more productive;

-- Kazakhstan wants an early U.S. presidential visit; and

-- recounted at length his humble origins and how he first caught President Nazarbayev's attention.

Saudabayev is a curious character, likely somewhat self-serving (as most tend to be in similar circumstances), but we have little doubt he has President Nazarbayev's ear. His request for an early U.S. presidential visit to Kazakhstan (see para 8 below), even if brief, should not be dismissed out of hand because there could be significant dividends for U.S. national interests. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On December 29, the Ambassador had a nearly three-hour one-on-one dinner in a private room of a popular Uzbek restaurant in Astana with President Nursultan Nazarbayev's reputed closest adviser, State Secretary Kanat Saudabayev. Not unusual for senior Kazakhstani officials, Saudabayev drank abstemiously and only sipped at the occasional toasts. Although Saudabayev's Chief of Staff Roman Vassilenko was to have joined the dinner, Saudabayev sent him away to "go mind the store." Key bilateral issues are in paras 3-6 below.

NORTHERN DISTRIBUTION NETWORK

¶3. (C) Having met only three days earlier with Secretary of the Security Council Kairbek Suleymenov to once again clarify the U.S. goal for a Northern Distribution Network (NDN) for Afghanistan (reftel A), the Ambassador emphasized the increasing urgency of Kazakhstan signing on to TRANSCOM's NDN. Saudabayev responded, "We'll have a positive answer as soon as possible. Thanks for answering our questions. Thanks for all the clarifications you made in recent weeks. The President trusts your word."

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WTO ACCESSION

¶4. (C) The Ambassador recounted he had met on December 24 with Kazakhstan's WTO negotiator Zhana Aitzhanova and had pressed for accelerated bilateral negotiations with the United States for Kazakhstan's WTO accession (reftel B). Saudabayev responded, "We want to work fast on this for our own interests. We understand you have your own interests. We hope for compromise on both sides. Can we come together on this? We need a quick positive outcome. We are not playing you against Russia, but there are 'strong special interests' here against WTO. We understand this is a question of our own sovereignty, but I emphasize there are strong special interests within our own government."

PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER UNDER INVESTIGATION

¶5. (C) Saudabayev credibly responded he was unaware of the case of Peace Corps Volunteer Anthony Sharp who is currently under investigation for having trespassed at a restricted site and for having been apprehended with a bag allegedly containing industrial explosives (reftel C). He asked, "Is this the KNB (Committee for National Security, the pro-Moscow ex-KGB intelligence service) or MVD (Ministry of Internal Affairs)?" The Ambassador responded, "MVD is investigating, but we strongly suspect the KNB is at the root of this. We consider the case, based on concrete evidence, a clear provocation and totally incompatible with our positive relationship. We are outraged, but we want this to continue to be kept quiet, out of the media. I insist to all American citizens in Kazakhstan that they must follow Kazakhstan's laws. In this case, as soon as the investigation is concluded, no matter the outcome, we want you to deport Sharp -- get this off the bilateral agenda. This is an irritant you do not want for the new U.S. administration." Saudabayev picked up his cell phone, dialed a number, but received no answer. He said, "We'll take care of this."

RAKHAT ALIYEV

¶6. (C) Saudabayev asked if the Ambassador had passed to Washington, including to the FBI, the non-paper and records

of court cases the Presidential Administration via the Foreign Ministry had provided on December 23 against Nazarbayev's exiled former son-in-law, Rakhat Aliyev. The Ambassador assured Saudabayev he had indeed passed the text of the non-paper to Washington, including to the FBI (reftel D). The Ambassador reiterated the U.S. position: we have had no contact with Aliyev; we want to contact with him; we consider this strictly an internal Kazakhstani affair. Saudabayev did not press further.

NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST

¶ 17. (C) Saudabayev told the Ambassador he intends to travel to Washington for the National Prayer Breakfast on February 5 and asked if it would be possible to meet then with the new Secretary of State. The Ambassador told him this might well be too early in the new administration, simply because of the initial logistics of organizing new personnel in the State Department, but said he would certainly make the recommendation. The Ambassador urged Saudabayev to travel later for better access, and asked him to make a special effort on Capitol Hill because of Kazakhstan's frequently stated frustration with the annual human-rights certification and the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. Saudabayev responded he has already, with Nazarbayev's blessing, planned an April trip to Washington.

REQUEST FOR AN EARLY OBAMA VISIT

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¶ 18. (C) Saudabayev added, "The President very much wants an Obama visit to Astana as soon as possible, even if only a brief stop-over to-from China. He was totally delighted with Obama's post-election phone call. This made a very deep and very positive impression. I want to help keep this momentum alive. We need this visit to keep us from being 'swallowed up' by our 'best friend' to the north. We fully understand your new president will want to repair the U.S. relationship with Russia, but please don't sell us short just to please Moscow. Keep the balance. Let us play a positive role for you in this region. This is what President Nazarbayev wants.

I assure you I am speaking for him personally." (NOTE: After the U.S. presidential election, the Foreign Ministry also made a case for an early Obama visit to Kazakhstan (reftel E). END NOTE.)

PLUCKED FROM THE STICKS

¶ 19. (C) During the course of the evening's conversation, Saudabayev asserted he is Number Two in President Nazarbayev's inner circle, and Security Council Secretary Suleymenov is Number Three. The Ambassador asked Saudabayev about his history, noting that he himself was a "little kid from the small-town Midwest." Clearly pleased, Saudabayev recounted that he, too, was a "boy from the glubinka (the sticks)." Somehow, despite his humble village origins, he had been plucked to study at an art institute in the then-Leningrad. He recounted how he had been thrown in with arrogant Muscovites and Leningraders and that he would "never forget the insults." He said he had endured endless practical jokes against him, because of his provincial Central Asian origin, and that he had frequently been called behind his back a "chornaya zhopa" (a strong, racist insult).

He said he initially had been miserable in Leningrad and frequently begged his father to let him return to the village and be "a simple boy." But his father had always told him, "Never! Study, study, study. Beat them and make me proud. Be a Kazakh!" At the end of the first-year exams, he came out at the top of his class -- the only Central Asian to do so. Nazarbayev, "then a big man in the Soviet Communist Party," heard about his success and took a personal interest in him, treated him like a younger brother. They have been intensely loyal to each other ever since. When President Nazarbayev told him to go to the United States as Kazakhstan's ambassador, Saudabayev said he told the

President, "I don't want to go. Let me stay in (the then-capital) Almaty with you. But the President told me I must obey him. And so I went." Saudabayev concluded, "Please listen to Nazarbayev. He wants to trust you. Return his trust, and you will not be disappointed."

¶110. (C) COMMENT: Saudabayev is a curious character, both an international player and a throwback to an earlier age of confidante courtiers. It could be that Nazarbayev especially trusts him because Saudabayev is never mentioned as a possible successor to Nazarbayev. We have little doubt that many of Saudabayev's accounts are somewhat self-serving, but, at the same time, we believe that his whispers into Nazarbayev's ear carry some weight -- viz., his call to the Ambassador on December 30 that Nazarbayev had just approved Kazakhstan's participation in NDN. We support his request for an early visit to Kazakhstan, even if brief, by President Obama, and generally concur with Saudabayev that it could pay important dividends for U.S. national interests. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND